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CIA recruiting city police to help battle terrorists

From Chicago Tribune wires

WASHINGTON—The CIA is recruiting big-city police officers to serve as temporary intelligence officers and to counter terrorism overseas, an agency spokeswoman said Monday.

Sharon Foster said the agency has hired police officers in the past and a current recruitment drive is similar to "the sort of program we had going for engineers and people we had a great need for in the agency."

Foster said police officers have investigative skills required by the CIA and although they are not being recruited specifically to counter terrorism "there has never been terrorism on as great a scale as it is now."

She also said she did not know how many officers are being sought and from what cities, but the New York Times reported today the police departments of New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, Houston, Boston and San Francisco are among 18 municipal departments asked by the CIA to allow the recruitment.

New York's police department is participating, the Times said, while at least one department—the Los Angeles Police Department—has refused to.

Chicago Police Supt. Fred Rice

said Monday he attended a seminar on terrorism last summer at the CIA headquarters in McLean, Va., where he said the CIA said it was considering seeking experienced city police officers to combat terrorism abroad.

Rice said the CIA never contacted the Chicago Police Department to recruit any police officers but if they did, "we would co-operate."

"They [CIA] said their green recruits had no street experience and they were considering seeking seasoned police officers," said Rice.

New York's Police Commissioner, Benjamin Ward, said in an interview that the Director of Central Intelligence, William J. Casey, urged him and top officials from the other police departments at a meeting in July to help the recruitment project.

"Bill Casey informed us that the CIA was interested in hiring retired or presently employed police officers who had backgrounds in handling undercover operators or who had been undercover operators themselves," Ward said.

"We did not have terrorism before and we have to respond. It's laudatory that we can do something in the interests of national defense."

A spokesman for the city police, Inspector Robert F. Burke, said

that as a result of an internal survey of possible applicants 210 detectives and investigators in special units expressed interest in joining the federal agency.

Burke said 68 took an eight-hour examination given by the CIA on Oct. 4, the first screening step in hiring.

CIA spokeswoman Kathy Pherson said she believed that this was the first attempt by the agency to employ large numbers of trained police officers for intelligence work.

Pherson said the CIA officials solicited the officials of 18 police departments at an unpublicized intelligence seminar on terrorism held last July 21 at CIA headquarters.

The response from the police departments for cooperation was "good," Pherson said. But she declined to say how many cities agreed to assist in the recruitment drive or how many police investigators the CIA wanted to employ.

Police officials in Los Angeles said the city's Chief of Police, Daryl F. Gates, rejected the CIA request. He would not comment directly on the CIA proposal but through a spokesman, Cmdr. William D. Booth, Gates said, "We need all the police talent we have right here."